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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 26th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TEIRLINCK (Belgium)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 113: HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (continued) (A/49/176 and Add.1, A/49/219 and Add.1, A/49/406, A/49/445, A/49/527 and A/49/587; A/C.5/48/37 and Add.1 and A/C.5/48/45; A/C.5/49/5, A/C.5/49/6 and Corr.1 and Add.1, A/C.5/49/13, A/C.5/49/14 and A/C.5/49/32)

1. Mr. DJACTA (Algeria) said that the reforms introduced in the United Nations had produced an upheaval in its most sensitive sector - its personnel. The reforms must not be allowed to increase the feeling of uncertainty among the staff of the Secretariat or undermine their career prospects. Priority should therefore be given to the early elaboration of an overall career development plan. All the reforms should, in fact, be designed to make the Secretariat more effective.

2. Algeria had always attached importance to equitable geographical representation in recruitment as a means of making the United Nations truly universal and democratic. It was clear from the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat (A/49/527) that the method for calculating the desirable ranges of States could be improved. In particular, the three factors used in the calculation - membership, budget contribution and population - were too restrictive; the system should be redesigned to correct the existing imbalances.

3. The situation of women in the Secretariat had not improved, especially where the developing countries were concerned. It was even worse in the case of African women, who accounted for only 2.9 per cent of the total. The recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on the advancement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/49/176) were therefore welcome and would be examined constructively by his delegation.

4. In its report on the administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peace-keeping operations (A/49/664), the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) had noted that there was a lack of clear functional differentiation between international contractual personnel and staff members in the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and that the former appeared to be supervising the latter in some instances. Algeria shared the Advisory Committee's concern about that situation and about the lack of equitable geographical representation in the recruitment of international contractual personnel. Despite some recent improvement, the imbalance persisted. He would welcome clarification of the situation from the Secretariat.

5. If the capacity of the Secretariat to respond more flexibly to the new demands was to be enhanced, its structure must be simplified and its functions more clearly defined. Decentralization of authority was also desirable, provided that adequate arrangements were made for reporting and accountability. All the reform measures should be reinforced by improvements in the essential factor, training, which should receive greater attention and resources.

6. Mr. Abdel RAHMAN (Sudan) said that his delegation considered the human resources of the United Nations to be of the utmost importance. He welcomed current efforts to raise staff standards, and supported the strategy submitted by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/49/5), with a view to bringing about a radical transformation in the organization of the Secretariat, and making it highly professional, responsible and unbiased. In order to achieve those aims, it would be necessary, to implement a programme of work, within a well-defined time scale to ensure that the strategy did not remain a plan on paper only. A highly qualified workforce, carefully and fairly selected, would guarantee that the United Nations had the ability to carry out the duties required of it. Careful recruitment would ensure that suitably qualified staff were selected, obviating the need for expensive further training programmes. Staff could gain experience through increased mobility within the Organization. It was essential to build up trust in the staff. High recruiting standards would facilitate decentralization and give all staff members greater opportunity to make meaningful contributions to programmes. Decentralization and delegation of authority could, however, not be achieved without revised, transparent and comprehensible regulations which could be easily implemented. The strategy proposed by the Secretary-General outlined all the necessary changes. The financial resources should be made available to achieve the aims of the strategy.

7. His delegation had always supported the Secretary-General's efforts to improve the United Nations and to make it a functional Organization which would truly represent the world, having representatives of every State working in the Secretariat. He therefore hoped that efforts to reduce the number of unrepresented or underrepresented States would continue, and that the recruitment authorities would be guided by the principles set out in document A/49/527, in particular the principle of equitable geographical distribution. He also supported continuing efforts to increase the representation of women in posts subject to geographical distribution.

8. His delegation shared the concern expressed by the Secretary-General in his report (A/C.5/49/6) concerning disregard for the privileges and immunities of United Nations officials, and stressed that primary responsibility for the security and protection of staff members, their families and property and of the Organization's property rested with the host Government. He called upon Member States to fulfil their responsibilities under Article 105 of the Charter. He condemned the fatalities and kidnappings to which international civil servants had been exposed and called upon the United Nations to increase the level of protection for the staff. At the same time, he urged the Secretary-General to stress that the staff should not become involved in disputes between parties, but should remain neutral and confine themselves to the concerns laid down in the 1954 Report on Standards of Conduct in the International Civil Service. The Conventions on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies were absolutely fundamental, and he urged all States which had still not done so to accede to them as soon as possible.

9. Mr. BERGH (South Africa) said that his delegation shared the view expressed by the Secretary-General in his report on a strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization (A/C.5/49/5) that human resources planning

was a key element, for it would enable the Secretariat to identify staff vacancies in good time and ensure that the most suitable candidates were selected. The concepts of the broadest possible geographical representation, gender balance, competence, integrity and efficiency should continue to govern staff recruitment, and use should be made of internships, competitive examinations, panel interviews and occupational groupings to increase recruitment from unrepresented and underrepresented States.

10. The Secretary-General's intention to streamline emergency recruitment procedures was sound and was consistent with the objective of delegating accountability and responsibility. He was also right to argue that staff mobility was an important element of a career development programme and to reorient training activities to address the Organization's new challenges. South Africa supported in principle the system of early retirement since it would ensure flexibility in the filling of senior posts and redress the gender imbalance in the Secretariat. The new Performance Appraisal System would be welcome if it accurately assessed staff performance and improved accountability. It must, however, be objective and capable of implementation.

11. The lack of progress in the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat was disappointing and the Secretariat should redouble its efforts to recruit women, particularly from unrepresented and underrepresented countries. The 10-step programme recommended by JIU in its report on the status of women (A/49/176) merited serious consideration.

12. His delegation was concerned about the increasing dangers faced by United Nations personnel. It was particularly disturbing that not one arrest had been made in connection with the murders of 42 United Nations staff members during the past two years. The approval by the Sixth Committee of the draft convention on the safety of United Nations and associated personnel was therefore welcome, but the Secretariat and Member States must continue to take all measures to ensure the safety of United Nations staff.

13. South Africa supported the proposal of the Secretary-General regarding the simplification of the administration of justice within the Secretariat, as described in his report on the topic (A/C.5/49/13), since it would be of great benefit to the Secretariat.

14. Mrs. ARAGON (Philippines) said that the successful functioning of any organization depended on both its management and its staff. Since staff costs accounted for more than three quarters of the budget, the Organization's human resources must be more effectively managed. Her delegation was encouraged by the efforts made to achieve that goal, in particular the proposed strategy for more transparent and fair recruitment procedures and the new Performance Appraisal System. Some of the elements of the strategy must, however, be given careful study.

15. It was important to identify the Organization's personnel needs in the light of its mandates. The introduction of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) had unfortunately been delayed, but it should eventually enhance the capacity of the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). The Secretary-General's assurance that the Charter provisions

concerning recruitment would be observed was welcome, but his intention to use personnel agencies to recruit short-term and emergency personnel would require careful examination. Increased use should be made of the national rosters prepared by Member States.

16. The slow progress in improving the status of women in the Secretariat was regrettable, and the present level of 14 per cent of women at the D-1 and higher levels even more so. It seemed that the 25 per cent target would not be met by 1995. The majority of women in the United Nations still worked in the General Service and related categories, and their concerns were equally deserving of the Committee's attention. In particular, women could be helped to advance to the Professional category if a larger number of posts was set aside for qualified women in the internal examination system. The Secretary-General should give serious attention to the 10-step programme recommended by JIU, especially in view of the forthcoming Fourth World Conference on Women.

17. Several attempts to introduce a new performance appraisal system had failed in the past. If the new system was to be implemented, the concerns stated in paragraphs 100 to 102 of the JIU report on a new system of performance appraisal (A/49/219) would have to be addressed. Her delegation would welcome information from the Secretariat about what was being done to evaluate the managerial performance of officials at the D-2 level and above.

18. With regard to the reform of the internal system of justice, her delegation would support measures which would facilitate the early resolution of disputes, provide adequate protection against abuse and guarantee due process for all. It looked forward to receiving the results of the Secretariat's review on that topic. It also shared the concern about the safety and security of United Nations staff and hoped that the draft convention on the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel would improve the situation.

19. Ms. BUERGO (Cuba) regretted that the report on personnel recruitment requested by her delegation from JIU during the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly had not been completed on time because of the Secretariat's failure to provide the inspectors with the required information in a timely manner. Such inaction limited the decisions of Member States and the work of external oversight bodies. Consideration of agenda item 133 should be left open until the report could be evaluated.

20. Her delegation had studied with interest the statistical summary of the current composition of the Secretariat contained in document A/49/527 and was of the opinion that in future such reports should contain a real analysis of the topic in the light of the relevant decisions of the General Assembly.

21. She welcomed the ending on 3 June of the temporary suspension of the external recruitment of Secretariat staff, which had impeded efforts to improve the representation of some Member States. She was, however, concerned that, as of 30 June 1994, 28.8 per cent of the Member States were still either unrepresented or underrepresented. That figure cast doubt on the application of the principle of equitable geographical representation in the United Nations. For that reason, her delegation did not understand the rationale for including in the national competitive examinations States which were already adequately

represented in the Professional category and above. The General Assembly should decide that priority should be given to unrepresented or underrepresented States in such examinations. Moreover, candidates from those countries who passed the examinations should be given priority in recruitment.

22. Her delegation welcomed the promotion of representatives of four developing countries to recently created posts; such promotions were important because they were in keeping with resolution 41/231, which, inter alia, endorsed recommendation 47 in the report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations (A/41/49). In some cases, however, recommendation 55 in the same report, which reaffirmed the principle that no post should be considered to be the exclusive domain of a Member State or group of States, had not been respected. She hoped that the Secretariat would apply that principle fully in the future, also within the framework of the new system of responsibility and accountability.

23. Her delegation was alarmed by the figures given in the report on the advancement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/49/527). The number of women in the Organization had increased by only 10 per cent in a decade; if the same rate of increase was maintained, it would be difficult to achieve the target of 35 per cent by 1995.

24. It was also essential to consider the existing inequities in the geographical distribution of the staff in certain units of the Organization and she asked the Secretariat to submit a conference room paper reflecting the geographical composition of the staff of the various substantive departments. Moreover, as real transparency in the vacancy management system was imperative, her delegation hoped that the report being prepared by JIU on that topic would contain a thorough analysis of the implementation of that system.

25. Her delegation fully supported the recommendations in the JIU report on a new system of performance appraisal (A/49/219). It also noted the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General on a strategy for the management of the Organization's human resources (A/C.5/49/5), but regretted that they had been submitted in the form of revised budget estimates. It hoped that in future the Secretariat would avoid submitting substantive proposals in budget documents.

26. Referring to the amendments to the Staff Rules (A/C.5/48/37), which, in violation of the decision of Member States to consider them during the current session, had been put into effect through an administrative decision of the Secretariat, she said that her delegation would like to know what corrective measures the Secretariat intended to apply, within the new management culture, to staff members who did not respect the mandates and prerogatives of other principal organs. Moreover, her delegation could in no way accept that the question of respect for the privileges and immunities of international civil servants should be considered in two different forums, and proposed that the analysis of the entire topic should be referred to the Sixth Committee.

27. Ms. ALMAO (New Zealand), speaking also on behalf of Australia and Canada, expressed the disappointment of those delegations at the slow progress made in

improving the status of women in the Secretariat. Efforts would have to be redoubled if the 35 per cent target was to be reached by 1995. If the "succession plan" for women currently in course of preparation was strictly followed, however, it was conceivable that it could be reached and she urged that the effort be made. The lack of any change in the proportion of women in senior policy-making positions was disturbing; according to even the most optimistic projections, the 1995 target of 25 per cent would not be reached until 1997. The full implementation of the Secretary-General's new strategy for the management of human resources should go a long way towards providing equal opportunities and treatment for women. The three delegations welcomed the commitment of the Secretariat's senior management team to accord gender issues a special place in the new system of accountability and responsibility, and reiterated their support for the delegation to individual programme managers of the responsibility for improving gender balance and providing career development opportunities for women. They particularly welcomed the firm commitment to the breaking down of the remaining structural and attitudinal barriers through the implementation of a vigorous strategic plan of action for the period 1995-2000.

28. The three delegations supported the 10-step programme recommended by JIU (A/49/176) with a view to ensuring equitable work policies and practices throughout the Secretariat, and called for the incorporation of an equal opportunity employment programme in the recruitment and selection procedures of OHRM, and for efforts by Member States to propose more qualified women candidates, encourage qualified women to apply for vacant posts, and publicize employment opportunities.

29. Mr. GOUMENNY (Ukraine) said that some improvements had been made in personnel polices and in the composition of the Secretariat and his delegation noted the role played by the Secretary-General in that process. In his report on a strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization (A/C.5/49/5, para. 23), however, the Secretary-General stated that, despite a substantial expansion of the Organization's mandates, commensurate changes and modernization in human resources management had not occurred. Ukraine generally supported the arguments contained in that report and in the Secretary-General's report on human resource management policies (A/49/445). The measures for the decentralization of programmes and delegation of authority could lead to a rationalization of human resource management practices.

30. Personnel policies must be based on the principles and rules governing the composition of the Secretariat, on enhanced professional qualifications and career development, and on the safety of United Nations personnel. The performance of the Secretariat would be enhanced if its membership was continually renewed by the recruitment of competent staff on a broad geographical basis in accordance with the Charter provisions and the post quotas assigned to Member States. There should be a regular rotation of staff in order to prevent the Secretariat from becoming a closed system incapable of change. Any further increase in the number of permanent staff members could impede the enhancement of the Secretariat's effectiveness. It was essential to have a skeleton of permanent staff, but the Administration should have the authority to dismiss personnel who had ceased to be of use to the Organization. The ratio of permanent to fixed-term staff should be no more than one to one.

31. The practice of secondment was useful to the Organization, especially to the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, and Ukraine would continue to second specialists to work in the United Nations.

32. The continuing situation in which many States, including Ukraine, were significantly underrepresented in the Secretariat was regrettable. It was unfortunately clear from its report (A/C.5/48/45) that the Working Group on the equitable geographical representation of Member States in the Secretariat had been unable to agree on specific recommendations. In any event, it would be a mistake to apply the existing quota system more flexibly or to try to solve the problem by the means outlined in paragraph 5 (i) of that report. Ukraine was not calling for a moratorium on the consideration of candidates from significantly overrepresented countries, but it should be noted that the number of personnel recruited from Ukraine amounted to only 60 per cent of the mid-point of its range. In those circumstances the trend for Ukrainian staff members to be "squeezed out" of the Secretariat, as had happened with the disbanding of the Centre on Apartheid, came as no surprise. The representation of Ukraine should increase following the holding of a competitive examination for vacant P-2 and P-3 posts in Kiev in 1995. That would, however, solve only part of the problem. Ukraine had many highly qualified experts capable of occupying much higher positions in the Secretariat. His delegation was inclined to conclude that a special intergovernmental body should be established to monitor the implementation of personnel policies.

33. The improvement of staff training must not become an end in itself; it was possible to recruit personnel who already had a high level of qualifications. In that connection, the introduction of a new management culture and the policy of recruiting only on a competitive basis were welcome; no priority should be given to internal candidates. As for career development, promotions should be based solely on competence and integrity.

34. His delegation was particularly concerned about the safety of United Nations personnel, which was a fundamental element of effective human resources management. It therefore welcomed the approval by the Sixth Committee of the draft convention on the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel and hoped that it would be adopted unanimously by the General Assembly.

35. Mr. SOOMRO (Pakistan) said that, under the new Performance Appraisal System, it was important that the responsibilities of managers at all levels should be commensurate with their authority and that accountability should be ensured through that system. Incentives for women to join the Organization and the streamlining of the vacancy announcement process were also important. His delegation supported the draft convention on the safety and security of United Nations and associated personnel approved by the Sixth Committee.

36. Referring to changes in the human resources management system, he said that costs should be reviewed in order to achieve the maximum possible reduction. For example, he proposed that regional workshops might be used as a substitute for field visits by consultants.

37. Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Suriname, said that those delegations supported the strategy to modernize and re-energize human resources management in the global Secretariat of the United Nations (A/C.5/49/5), but believed that a careful balance should be established among its various elements.

38. He expressed concern that the CARICOM States had, for no apparent reason, been combined with North America in the statistical presentations in the report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/49/527), with the result that the true situation of those States had been obscured. The failure to meet the targets set for the improvement of the gender imbalance in the Secretariat by 1995 was disappointing and it was to be hoped that the implementation of the Secretary-General's plan of action would result in them being met by 1997. The low level of representation of women - and of men - from developing countries was still a matter for concern, as was the fact that they were in general confined to the lower Professional levels.

39. With regard to human resources management, the delegations of the CARICOM States and of Suriname took a special interest in entry-level recruitment matters, and intended to work with other delegations and the Secretariat in formulating approaches in that and other areas. They strongly believed that there was a need for consistency and continuity in the execution of the agreed strategy.

40. Mr. HALLIDAY (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) thanked the members of the Committee for their consideration and support of the strategy and other important elements of the Secretary-General's report. He stressed the commitment of OHRM to the full and successful implementation of the new Performance Appraisal System to be introduced in 1995. In response to a comment by the representative of Australia, he said that performance appraisal would be introduced at the highest levels, including the D-2 level and expressed his belief that it should also cover the assistant secretary-general level. OHRM shared the views of JIU regarding the introduction of the new Performance Appraisal System.

41. He was optimistic that, despite the challenges of implementation, the introduction of a performance appraisal database would enable the Secretariat to direct its human resources strategy towards the institution of an effective dialogue between management and staff in order to be more effective in addressing perceived weaknesses, assessing the skills available and developing career management for the Organization.

42. He was encouraged by the support expressed by a number of delegations for the enhanced attrition programme and intended to consider a more general review of personnel retention policy along the lines of what he described as an "up-or-out" system, while showing due regard for geographical distribution. However, the current concern was to initiate a programme that would encourage staff to leave the Organization earlier than originally intended with a sense of dignity and appreciation for their efforts, when it was mutually agreed that their departure was in the best interests of the Secretariat. Although such a mechanism was not new, it would have to remain the principal means of

revitalizing the Organization's staff until a strong performance appraisal database made other administrative actions possible.

43. The most manifest indication that the Secretariat had heeded the repeated calls for transparency in its administration was the improvement in staff-management relations, which had led to an improved dialogue in the Joint Advisory Committee and the Staff-Management Coordination Committee and which was further reflected in the statements of the Presidents of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System (CCISUA) and of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA). Further evidence of positive staff-management cooperation could be found in the proposed reform of the internal system of justice (A/C.5/49/13); he noted that the favourable reception of that reform by the staff had been described by several delegations as a good omen. The early reconciliation of conflicts and the professionalization of the arbitration and disciplinary processes would considerably enhance the efficiency of the system. In his follow-up and detailed report to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General would address the concerns expressed by delegations about the separation of the administrative and judicial processes, the time-frame for implementation and evaluation, the costs of the existing system, the need to examine arbitration and the settlement of disputes, and cost-effectiveness in staff counselling. The need for swift and effective action was also a primary concern, and he shared the sentiment expressed by one delegation that justice delayed was justice denied.

44. The development of a central planning capability within OHRM was vital if the Office was to direct developments rather than react to them, and would be a catalyst in turning recruitment, placement and promotion policies into effective action. It would also be linked to the needs assessments, skills inventories, career pathing and performance-based career development elements called for by a number of delegations. The establishment of a central planning and policy capacity, which OHRM currently lacked, was also crucial if the training programmes that were vital to the restructuring of the Organization's human resources to meet new demands and challenges were to be instituted. Expenditure on training was a wise and necessary investment and he welcomed the call by some delegations for an increase in training funds provided that there was an assurance that programmes directly benefited from training. Guidance from Member States and data provided through enhanced human resource databases and support from the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) would be invaluable in developing the training programmes so critical to a transformation of the Organization's management culture.

45. Recruitment policies continued to be the subject of considerable attention, and he was gratified by the recognition expressed by a number of delegations of the progress achieved by OHRM in modestly reducing the number of both unrepresented and overrepresented Member States. He agreed, however, that more needed to be done. He took note of the proposals made by several delegations and appreciated the support which had been expressed for the range of recruitment measures planned. He wholeheartedly agreed that the competitive examination recruitment process was of great value and reassured those representatives who had expressed concern about the recruitment of candidates through the national examination process that OHRM had been making every effort

to meet its placement commitments in respect of national examinations. He agreed, however, that there was a need to examine how and when successful candidates were placed. He also shared the views of those representatives who had noted that the levels of remuneration and conditions of service of staff appeared to have lost their competitiveness and should be examined.

46. It was the Secretariat's intention to enhance staff mobility through the introduction of an appropriate contractual clause at the time of recruitment. A more mobile staff would better serve the needs of the Organization and would, in particular, enhance the international character of the regional commissions. However, he appreciated the need to develop and manage a reliable system of staff rotation among duty stations and substantive departments to which both staff and management would be committed. He also recognized that, as one delegation had pointed out, staff movement raised issues relating to spouse employment, and the organizations in the common system would be encouraged to be helpful in that regard.

47. The statistics on the composition of the Secretariat showed that the traditional inequality between men and women within the Organization persisted, a situation that was unlikely to change without decisive action by Member States and the Secretariat itself. OHRM greatly appreciated the contribution of JIU in focusing the Committee's attention on a number of pressing issues and agreed with those delegations which had called for the implementation of the Secretary-General's strategic plan and the 10-step plan advocated by JIU (A/49/176), and recommended that managers should be held accountable for their performance in that important area. He fully shared the view that improvement would require determined, committed and relentless leadership on the part of the Organization's managers. He had taken note of the call for increased training to improve communications and sensitivity towards the problems of women in the Secretariat and for the strict enforcement of disciplinary measures to eliminate sexual harassment. The concern expressed by one delegation about the level of representation of African women would receive due attention from the Secretariat, as would the concerns expressed by another delegation about the conditions of employment of women in the General Service category.

48. An enhanced programme of internships and non-reimbursable loans of young professional staff was one means of identifying young talent, including women. Unfortunately, despite the support expressed for those programmes by a number of delegations, he was obliged to inform the Committee that the programme would probably be delayed because of the need to implement staff reductions decided upon in 1988.

49. The most difficult question in connection with the strategy for the management of the Organization's human resources was whether OHRM had the capacity to implement the strategy within its existing resources. Although the Office was in the process of eliminating 12 posts to implement the reductions in human resources administration decided upon in 1988, he was pleased to confirm that it would continue to implement the vast majority of the innovations outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/49/5) through redeployment within the resources already provided for in its budget. OHRM was already redesigning its methods of work to enhance the services required by its client departments and to interact with Member States in order to achieve mutual

goals, through streamlining, decentralization and the delegation of authority to programme managers within a system of full accountability. He fully shared the view expressed by a number of Member States that empowerment of managers was an important element of the system of accountability and responsibility, although he also shared the caution voiced by other delegations that OHRM should retain prime responsibility for planning and policy-making.

50. OHRM could not achieve its goal without enhanced support from the members of the Committee. The establishment of a new planning and policy function was fundamental to the achievement of the Office's goals, as was the deployment of training and implementation teams to introduce the new Performance Appraisal System in 1995. Those tasks exceeded the Office's existing capacity. He was therefore grateful that many delegations had recognized that the Secretariat's additional requirements were modest in comparison to the projected gains and that financial stringency had often led to the abandonment of worthy programmes.

51. The staff of OHRM was deeply committed to the effective implementation of a system which the Secretary-General had envisioned two years previously and which Member States had been seeking for some time. Member States had given OHRM the benefit of their wisdom and guidance: what the Office now required was their theoretical and tangible support, without which it would be unable to progress any further.

AGENDA ITEM 111: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (A/49/32 and Add.1-3, A/49/212, A/49/276 and Add.1-2 and A/49/531; A/C.5/49/2/Rev.1 and A/C.5/49/34 and Corr.1)

52. Ms. ROTHEISER (Chairman of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/49/32 and Add.1-3), said that, in accordance with its biennial programme of work, the Committee had devoted much of its attention during the current year to the control and limitation of documentation.

53. In resolution 47/202 B, the General Assembly had decided to undertake a comprehensive review of the need for and usefulness and timely issuance of verbatim and summary records on the basis of a report submitted by the Secretary-General through the Committee on Conferences. In reviewing that report (A/49/276 and Add.1 and 2) the Committee had found verbatim and summary records to be particularly costly in financial and human terms and had noted that their timely issuance was often prevented by constraints in resources; that undermined their usefulness. The Committee stressed the importance of summary records and recommended that their timely issuance should be improved. It further recommended that the General Assembly should again request the chairmen of the relevant organs and subsidiary bodies to propose the adoption of time-limits for speakers, as it had done in resolution 48/222 A, paragraph 11.

54. While it agreed on the need for verbatim and summary records for bodies of a political or legal nature, the Committee believed that there was a need to review procedures and streamline the provision of meeting records and, in paragraph 54 of its report (A/49/32), it recommended which bodies should continue to receive verbatim records, which should receive summary records in lieu of verbatim records, which should be provided with summary records and might be invited or requested to review their need, and which should no longer

receive meeting records. The Committee also recommended (para. 53) that the General Assembly should invite the bodies established by the Charter of the United Nations to review their entitlement to meeting records and it appealed to the treaty bodies authorized to establish their own practice to review their need.

55. The Committee had also considered the report of the Secretary-General on compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of pre-session documentation (A/49/531) and, in paragraphs 64 to 67 of its report (A/49/32), it recommended action to improve compliance with the rule. The Committee had also reviewed the comprehensive study on conference services (A/C.5/49/34) which, for lack of time and resources had concentrated on conference services at Headquarters although its findings were applicable elsewhere. The study had found that the demand for conference services had increased significantly since 1991 and exceeded the current capacity, identified means of enhancing the productivity and efficiency of conference services, and stressed the need for improved communications between conference services and the users of those services. The Committee believed that the study was an appropriate basis for the presentation of proposals for the 1996-1997 programme budget; in that connection, it was important to take into account, inter alia, the need for more transparent indicators, better information on the cost of meetings and documentation, and a detailed analysis of staff and other resource requirements. The Committee welcomed the efforts made by the Office of Conference and Support Services and urged it to continue exploring ways and means of providing services in a manner that made optimum, and the most cost-effective, use of the conference-servicing resources and facilities available world wide, with due regard for quality and timeliness.

56. She emphasized the need for adequate human, financial and material resources to cope with the conference-servicing workload and to provide high-quality services to the Organization. The Committee had reviewed the report of the Secretary-General on programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1992-1993 (A/49/135 and Add.1) concerning section 41J (Office of Conference Services, New York) and recommended, in paragraph 72 of its report, that the General Assembly should pay the utmost attention to the improvement in the quality of conference services, particularly documentation-processing.

57. Judging from the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1995, the upcoming year would be a particularly busy one, owing to the numerous subsidiary organs established in recent years and the four special conferences scheduled for 1995. An effort had been made to devise a programme that met the needs of the Organization while avoiding as far as possible any overlapping of meetings relating to the same sector of activity in the same location. In response to a request by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Committee on Conferences was recommending that no meetings should be held on 2 March and 9 May 1995.

58. Over the years, the Committee on Conferences had endeavoured to heighten awareness regarding the optimum utilization of conference resources. The overall and average utilization factors had increased over the reporting period to 84 per cent and 83 per cent respectively, representing gains of 7 per cent

and 5 per cent. In a further effort to improve utilization, compliance and availability indices had been incorporated into statistics on documentation and would in future include figures on the capacity utilization of conference services for interpretation and documentation in New York, Geneva and Vienna. The Committee on Conferences would expand the sample of United Nations organs used in the statistical analysis to include the Main Committees and ACABQ.

59. In recent years, there had been exchanges of letters between the Committee and the chairmen of organs whose utilization factors had been lower than the established benchmark figure for their previous three sessions. Following those exchanges, the Committee on Information had decided to reduce its meetings entitlement.

60. The Committee on Conferences had considered the question of unified conference services at Vienna, which would become a reality on 1 January 1995, and urged the General Assembly to complete its consideration of the matter by the end of 1994. Revised budget estimates had already been submitted.

61. With respect to meetings of subsidiary bodies away from their established headquarters, the Committee on Conferences recommended that the waivers granted to the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council should be discontinued, and that the waiver granted to the Economic and Social Council itself should be reformulated in the light of General Assembly resolution 45/264, annex, paragraph 5 (c). The Committee on Conferences further recommended that the General Assembly, in considering exceptions under resolution 40/243, should take into account the financial implications of the waiver, its effect on the work of the organ in question, and the volume of work at the headquarters of the organ involved and at Headquarters. The report contained in document A/49/212 would in future be used as a basic reference when waivers were requested.

62. Mr. SEVAN (Assistant Secretary-General for Conference and Support Services and United Nations Security Coordinator) said that since approval of the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1995 by the General Assembly provided the legislative authority to hold conferences and meetings, it was essential that it should be adopted by the end of December 1994. The calendar for 1995 was particularly full: in addition to a considerable number of regular meetings, four special conferences had been scheduled. Moreover, the Fifth Committee planned to continue meeting through the first half of 1995 and might also meet in the second half of the year.

63. Since 1989, the demand for conference services had continued to increase. The problem of meeting that demand with the available staff resources and physical facilities was compounded by seasonal fluctuations. For example, the very high concentration of requests for meetings during the early stages of the General Assembly session far exceeded capacity. While the Office of Conference and Support Services tried to cope with the situation by juggling its resources, rather than by seeking to add to them, the situation was becoming more difficult every day, and there were limits to what could be done. In 1993, 34 per cent of the 460 requests for meetings of regional or other groups had gone unmet owing to insufficient facilities and resources.

64. Much of the increased demand resulted from intensified activity by the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies: the Council had held 424 meetings in 1993, compared with 149 in 1989. More meetings also brought more requests for documentation. The total translation workload relating to political and Security Council activities had increased from 22,000 pages in 1989 to 87,000 pages in 1993. As the Secretary-General had stated (A/49/1, para. 29), in effect the Council was now required to meet on an almost continuous basis in order to respond to rapidly evolving situations and to monitor the various peace-keeping operations. It might thus be appropriate to have conference-servicing resources specifically allocated to the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies and budgeted accordingly, since the overnight processing of Security Council documentation currently displaced other work.

65. The large number of meetings now held by the Fifth Committee and ACABQ might justify a similar arrangement for those bodies. Intensified peace-keeping activity accounted for much of the increased workload of ACABQ and of both substantive and servicing departments. For example, some 20 reports on the financing of peace-keeping operations had been produced in the past month alone, while from January to September 1994 51 reports, totalling 1,800 pages, concerning budgetary matters had been submitted to ACABQ and/or the General Assembly pursuant to Security Council decisions. The urgent processing of those reports required constant readjustments in work scheduling. Demand had also increased in the economic and social sectors with the addition to the calendar of over 20 new bodies.

66. The Committee on Conferences had once again considered the question of the control and limitation of documentation. Notwithstanding the many resolutions on the matter, the reality was that there was virtually no control or limitation of documentation. The volume had spiralled upwards beyond the processing capacity of the Office of Conference and Support Services. The blame lay with delegations, although many of them complained that documentation was excessive. The cost was staggering. The nominal cost of a standard 24-page report was $19,920 at Headquarters and $26,400 at Geneva, figures which did not include the cost of preparation or drafting. In the biennium 1992-1993, in New York and Geneva alone, the Organization had spent $290 million on the production of approximately 2.1 billion pages of parliamentary documentation, official records and publications.

67. For the most part, the increased demand made on the documentation-processing services had been met through the introduction of new technology and, more importantly, through increases in productivity. Between 1990 and 1994 the average daily output per translator at Headquarters had risen by almost 40 per cent. Such increases in productivity should have allowed for improvements in quality and timeliness, but instead they had been consistently overtaken by the growth in demand.

68. The overall volume, however, was only part of the problem. It was clear from the report on compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of pre-session documentation (A/49/531) that the crisis was also due to delays in the submission of documents for processing. For example, the total pre-session documentation for the current session of the General Assembly had been forecast at 14,400 pages, nearly all of which should have been issued by mid-August, six

weeks before the opening of the session. In reality, by that date only 3,500 pages had even been submitted for processing; moreover, some of the so-called "pre-session" documentation had still not been received. A related problem resulted from the General Assembly practice of requesting reports in December for meetings scheduled in the following January or February. In such cases, the manuscripts should have been submitted in November to comply with the six-week rule.

69. The innocent thus had to pay for the guilty, in that documents submitted on time were put aside in order to process those which were received late but required by an earlier date. It was obviously unfair, but there was little the Secretariat could do about it without disrupting the work of the bodies concerned. In the end, every document became a rush job at the expense of timeliness and quality. The quality of translations had become a concern since the elimination of a large part of revision - the basic quality control mechanism - in order to boost productivity. The comments made by delegations in that regard had been carefully noted.

70. The Committee on Conferences had also considered the question of written meeting records. While agreeing that verbatim or summary records were desirable for some political and legal bodies, it had recognized the need to streamline the provision of such records. Written records were costly, the nominal cost of one verbatim record in six languages being $13,800, and of one summary record $12,400. In the case of summary records, in particular, the increase in parliamentary documentation and the need to give it priority over the records had resulted in records being issued with extended delays, and their cost-effectiveness had thus been diminished. As the Committee would realize, no intergovernmental organ would actually say that it no longer required meeting records. Consequently any decision to rationalize the provision of records needed to be taken at a high level.

71. The comprehensive study on conference services (A/C.5/49/34) was only the latest in a long series of such reports, both external and internal. No part of the Secretariat had been studied, reviewed, examined or audited more often than conference services. As on previous occasions, no secrets had been revealed and no miracles offered. It was still not clear how to increase volume and quality while simultaneously cutting costs. The Committee might wish to note that no other international organization or multilingual Government with comparable services had found solutions that were any better than those in place at the United Nations.

72. The study had the merit of re-emphasizing the search for solutions and improved management techniques. As a result, efforts were being made to develop quality indicators to complement the current quantitative measurements; to introduce benchmarking techniques to compare the performance of units with similar functions; to calculate and prioritize real demand as a basis for resource allocation; to strengthen planning and seek an integrated approach to resource use with conference services in Geneva and Vienna; and to develop training plans that would allow the deployment of staff resources according to workload fluctuations. No matter what improvements were made, however, the increasing demand for conference services must be contained if services were to be provided to the entire satisfaction of delegations.

73. Lastly, the Committee on Conferences had reviewed the plans for a unified conference service at Vienna under United Nations administration, a project on which work had began in 1985. He trusted that the General Assembly would take a decision on the matter before the end of the year so that the new arrangements could be put into effect, as scheduled, on 1 January 1995.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.